

## **Civil Rights During the Progressive Era:**

### ***Establish the Context:***

- Based on what you know about the units of study we have already covered, what are the legal rights African Americans have been granted?
- Describe the status of African Americans during the Progressive Era.

### ***W.E.B Du Bois:***

Describe the background of the individual.

What is his position on Civil Rights? Use specific information from ABC-CLIO and Primary source.

### ***Booker T. Washington:***

Describe the background of the individual.

What is his position on Civil Rights? Use specific information from ABC-CLIO and Primary source.

***Evaluation:*** Booker T. Washington v. W.E.B. DuBois: Whose strategy do you believe would be most effective in improving the economic, political, and social status of the African-American community? Think about the historical context of the Progressive Era.

[print page](#)[close window](#)

## W.E.B. Du Bois

W.E.B. Du Bois was born in the small Massachusetts town of Great Barrington in 1868. While few African Americans lived there, white racism was a daily presence in his life. At the age of 15, while still a high school student, Du Bois became a correspondent for the *New York Globe*. His early writing focused on the problems of African Americans and the necessity of political action to combat racism.



Although Du Bois wanted to attend Harvard, he and his family could not afford the tuition. After high school, he headed south to Fisk University. In the South, he learned more about racism. He also spent his summers teaching in a rural school, in order to learn more about the South and its people.

After three years at Fisk, Du Bois transferred to Harvard with scholarship assistance. Though he received a bachelor's degree from Harvard in 1890 and a master's degree in 1891, Du Bois never felt completely at home there. "I was in Harvard but not of it," he said years later.

### A Broader Horizon

Du Bois went on to one of the world's foremost universities, the University of Berlin in Germany. There, he combined the study of philosophy, history, economics, and politics. His use of these disciplines in scientific social research won him recognition as the father of the social sciences. He completed his doctoral thesis, "The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in America," and received his Ph.D. from Harvard.

After teaching for a few years, Du Bois accepted a research position at the University of Pennsylvania. He designed and carried out a research project focused on an impoverished part of Philadelphia. After completing that study, he moved to Atlanta University, where he studied Africa and African Americans for the next 13 years.

### The Souls of Black Folks

At the beginning of his career, Du Bois thought that racism stemmed from ignorance and could be eradicated through education. As he studied the situation of African Americans in America, he changed his opinion.

In 1903, Du Bois published his most famous work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, insisting that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line." He advocated higher education for the "Talented Tenth" of black youth, who could then lead the rest of the community. He maintained that African Americans needed to take political action to combat racism. The only way to make progress, he said, was to "educate and agitate."

Du Bois' position brought him into conflict with Booker T. Washington, who was acknowledged as a leader of the African-American community in America. Washington said African Americans should give up the struggle for

"political power, insistence on civil rights, and higher education of Negro youth. They should concentrate all their energies on industrial education."

Soon, Du Bois led a series of meetings that led to the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He began a decades-long term as editor of the NAACP magazine, *The Crisis*.

### Into the 20th Century

In the 1930s, Du Bois left the NAACP, frustrated that it remained an organization led by white people. He returned to Atlanta University, continued his research and writing, and documented the contributions of African Americans to Reconstruction and the contributions of Africa to world civilization. He also attacked imperialism, which kept most of Africa in colonial subjugation. He advocated nuclear disarmament and was sympathetic to communism. The U.S. government indicted him as a "foreign agent," but he was acquitted.

Du Bois left the United States, declaring in a visit to Peking, "In my own country for nearly a century I have been nothing but a NIGGER." He moved to Ghana, becoming a Ghanaian citizen and a member of the Communist Party. He spent the last years of his life in Ghana and died in 1963, on the eve of the March on Washington for Jobs and Justice.

Select Citation Style:

[back to top](#) **Entry ID: 1187799**

#### MLA

"W.E.B. Du Bois." *American History*. ABC-CLIO, 2013. Web. 25 Feb. 2013.

[print page](#)[close window](#)

## Booker T. Washington

As the head of Tuskegee Institute (a leading center of African American education), Booker Taliaferro Washington was a major spokesperson for his race in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He believed that African Americans should advance through education and effort instead of seeking social and political equality with whites.



Washington was born a slave on April 5, 1856 on a plantation near Hale's Ford, Franklin County, Virginia. His father was an unknown white man; his mother was a cook on a plantation. After being emancipated in 1865, Washington's family moved to Malden, West Virginia, where he went to work in the salt furnaces and later in a coal mine. Imbued with a strong desire to get an education, Washington managed to take classes at night.

In 1872, at the age of 16, Washington entered Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia. Here, he came under the influence of the school's founder and principal, Samuel Chapman Armstrong. Armstrong emphasized a program of arts and sciences as well as industrial arts that would train African Americans for jobs and instill values. He believed that African Americans would be granted political and civil rights once they had proven themselves worthy of these rights.

Graduating from Hampton with honors in 1875, Washington returned to Malden to teach school. In 1878, he studied briefly at Wayland Seminary in Washington, D.C. before returning to Hampton as a teacher in a program for Native American students. In 1881, Washington became principal of a new state school for African Americans at Tuskegee, Alabama.

From the time of his arrival at Tuskegee, Washington assumed a leadership role. Finding that no land or buildings had been acquired for the school, he went to work winning the support of local whites and recruiting African American students. Thanks to his efforts, Tuskegee opened with 40 students in a dilapidated shanty loaned by the African American Methodist church. From these modest beginnings, Washington built Tuskegee into an institution with 540 acres of land and an enrollment of more than 400 students by 1888.

Like Hampton, Tuskegee offered training in a variety of skilled trades. Boys studied farming and dairying; girls learned cooking, sewing, and other homemaking skills. In the academic departments, the emphasis was on the practical applications of learning rather than learning for its own sake. Washington was also concerned that students be taught the beauty and dignity of labor. In addition, personal hygiene, manners, and moral education were stressed. Unlike Hampton, where the principal and most of the teachers were white, Tuskegee always had an all-African-American staff, including the famous agricultural chemist George Washington Carver. The school became known throughout the country and abroad. Graduates taught in all the Southern states, and institutions modeled on Tuskegee were started elsewhere.

Washington personally devoted a great deal of time and energy to raising money for Tuskegee and publicizing

the school and its philosophy. He was remarkably successful in securing financial aid from white Northern philanthropists, including Andrew Carnegie (who became the largest single donor) and philanthropic foundations such as the Peabody Education Fund, started by George Peabody.

Beginning in 1884, when Washington addressed the National Education Association in Madison, Wisconsin, he was in demand as a public speaker on education and race relations. Washington delivered his most famous speech at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta in 1895. The essence of his racial philosophy was contained in this statement: "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." Washington also advised African Americans to remain in the South instead of seeking advancement in the North.

After Washington's Atlanta speech, he was hailed as the spokesperson for his race and the successor to Frederick Douglass, who had died that same year. In 1896, Harvard University awarded Washington an honorary degree. Two years later, he received President William McKinley at Tuskegee, and in 1901, he dined at the White House with President Theodore Roosevelt, who consulted him on appointments and on Southern and racial policies. During Roosevelt's administration and that of William Howard Taft, Washington had more influence than any other African American.

In keeping with Washington's philosophy of economic self-help, he organized and became the head of the National Negro Business League, established in 1900 to help develop and support African American-owned businesses. In 1901, Washington published his autobiography, *Up from Slavery*. A bestseller in the United States and translated into more than a dozen languages, the book established Washington as a prototype of the self-made African American man.

Yet many African American intellectuals, notably Harvard-educated W. E. B. Du Bois, sharply criticized Washington's philosophy and methods. They charged that his emphasis on industrial education over academics limited African Americans to low-paying jobs. They also accused Washington of giving the nod to segregation and the disenfranchisement of African Americans. In fact, recent research has shown that although in public Washington was an accommodationist, in private he worked against disfranchisement and other forms of discrimination. Finally, Washington's critics attacked what they called the Tuskegee Machine, a vast network of graduates and followers, by which Washington maintained his power and sought to silence his opponents.

Washington used his influence in the white community and with African American editors to defend himself and his policies. He tried to weaken both the Niagara movement, started in 1905 by African Americans who disagreed with him, and the biracial National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, founded in 1909. By the time of his death from overwork on November 14, 1915, his philosophy of race relations had fallen out of favor. Nevertheless, Washington's ideas on economic self-reliance remained his lasting legacy.

### Further Reading

Harlan, Louis R., *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader*, 1972; Harlan, Louis R., *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*, 1983; Thornbrough, Emma Lou, ed., *Booker T. Washington*, 1969.